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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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July 28, 1998

The Honorable William E. Kennard
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, N.W., Room 222
Washington, D.C. 20544

CC: 96-45

Dear Chairman Kennard:

On behalf of the Illinois Hospital & Health Systems Association (IHHA) which represents over 200 Illinois hospitals and health systems, I am writing to express our serious concerns regarding the lack of rural health care representation on the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) proposed reorganization of the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) board (CC Docket Nos. 97-2195-45 and DA 98-1336).

We are aware that the FCC is responding to a Congressional order to combine the Rural Health Care Corporation board (RHCC), and the Schools and Libraries Corporation (SLC) into one entity to retain legal legitimacy. The IHHA can appreciate the diversity of constituents that the proposed USAC board will be responsible for providing meaningful universal service programs. The FCC proposal would create an 18-member governing board with seven of those members forming a Rural Health Care Advisory Committee. Regrettably, there is only one rural health care representative within the entire structure.

The IHHA is concerned that the special needs of rural health care providers will not be adequately voiced on this board. We are recommending the following changes:

- 1) rural health care representation be expanded to the same number as schools and libraries which is four; and
- 2) the Rural Health Care Advisory Committee consist entirely of members that possess experience in rural health and telehealth services.

We urge the FCC to make the above modifications to the USAC board. By creating a more equitable representation structure you will greatly assist rural health care providers in obtaining affordable and vital telecommunications services. Telemedicine and telehealth programs show great promise in increasing access to quality and affordable health care services for rural Americans. Reducing the costs of telecommunications services is vitally important to rural communities and their health care providers. If you have any questions or need more information contact Christopher Surrell, manager, regulatory affairs at 630-505-7777 ext. 276 or email (csurrell@ihha.org). Thank you for the opportunity to express our concerns.

Yours truly,

Ron Damasauskas
Group Vice President

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